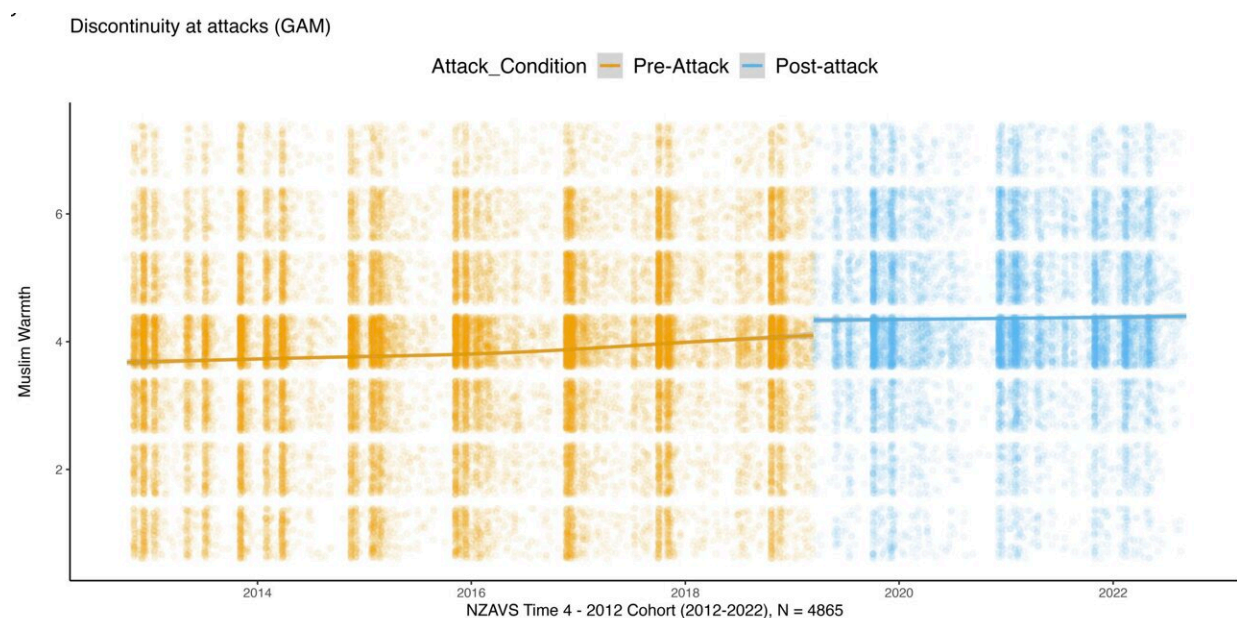


# Unintended consequences: Terror attacks cause long-term acceptance of targeted communities

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A regression discontinuity over the raw response data, implying a strong boost in acceptance following the attacks. There is no evidence in the raw data for regression to a pre-attack mean for Muslim acceptance. Credit: J. Bulbulia & C. G. Sibley

Violent actions intended to provoke opposition to particular communities may paradoxically lead to lasting acceptance, according to a study. On March 15, 2019, a far-right extremist killed 51 Muslims in

Christchurch, New Zealand. Immediately following the attacks there was a noticeable increase in public acceptance of the Muslim minority in the country. But was this acceptance sustained?

To address this question, Joseph Bulbulia and colleagues used years of data from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study, a national longitudinal study. The author's goal was to estimate the anticipated level of Muslim acceptance if the attacks had not occurred. These estimates were then compared with actual observations during the three years that followed the attacks.

The analysis showed that initial warmth towards Muslims among political liberals and moderates swiftly increased and then stabilized. Among political conservatives—a group the [extremist](#) aimed to agitate—warmth towards Muslims not only rose but maintained an upward trajectory, suggesting a particularly enduring impact within this demographic.

In stark contrast to the extremist's objective of inciting [public sentiment](#) against Muslims, the attack caused the reverse effect, particularly among conservatives. Instead, the attack nurtured a long-term acceptance of Muslims and eased social divisions. The intended result of the [attacks](#) completely backfired, according to the authors.

The research was published in *PNAS Nexus*.

**More information:** Joseph A Bulbulia et al, Long-term causal effects of far-right terrorism in New Zealand, *PNAS Nexus* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad242](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad242)

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